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U.S. AIDES URGING FORCE OF 350,000 FOR VIETNAM WAR

Expansion Sought in Saigon
Would 'Inevitably' Affect
Reserves and Guard

By CHARLES MOHR

Special to The New York Times

SAIGON, South Vietnam, Dec. 4 — The war in Vietnam is expected here to expand into a major conflict in which at least 350,000 American troops will oppose an ever-increasing army of North Vietnamese infiltrators.

An informed source said today that United States military leaders here asked Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara this week to approve a "force level" of 350,000 to 400,000 men.

"That's the level we are going to—no doubt about it," said the source.

Present strength is about 170,000, and it is expected to surpass 200,000 in the near future.

[In Washington, officials said an increase in the force in Vietnam to 350,000 men would "inevitably" involve calling reservists and guardsmen to active duty. Page 9.]

Forces in Korean War

The level proposed to the Defense Secretary during his visit is almost the level of United States troops committed to the Korean war. Five divisions fought there. The equivalent of more than three are already on the ground in South Vietnam, and more men are coming.

Key American officials here generally assume that the Communist regime in North Vietnam will attempt to match the increasing American commitment. Hanoi has already infiltrated at least nine regiments of regular troops to support the Vietcong guerrillas.

There is serious discussion, although no decisions have yet been taken, of such possibilities as spreading the war to Laos, and even to Cambodia, to attempt to block North Vietnamese infiltration routes and close Communist sanctuaries. The United States has already decided to intensify air attacks on Communist targets in southeastern Laos.

New Light on Battle

The heavy fighting in October and November—in which South Vietnamese and United States troops suffered more than 8,500 casualties—is being viewed in a different light now.

The battles were won, and were won decisively. But there is a realization, even with the present build-up in American strength, that they showed that the Vietcong-North Vietnamese forces were far from collapse and were also building up.

Military planners believe that one or preferably two United States divisions are needed to

augment the First Cavalry Division (Airmobile) in the difficult task of trying to control the Central Highlands plateau.

"A significant increase in troop numbers is necessary just to keep up with the game," said one official.

This has raised the question whether increased mobilization may be needed in the United States. The Army, it is said here, is far short of the support units needed to sustain a greater force in Vietnam.

Another question raised here is whether a military build-up on both sides might result in all-out conventional ground warfare with North Vietnam, possibly involving Chinese Communist reinforcements.

In the meantime, the increasing preoccupation with the military build-up has caused tensions between the defense establishment and the civilian American officials who are primarily concerned with trying to win the allegiance of hostile and uncommitted portions of the South Vietnamese population.

"Lip service is still given to pacification and political problems," one informed source related, "but it was inevitable that the sheer weight of the military here would begin to overwhelm the civilian effort."

The embassy, foreign-aid and United States Information Agency officials are not quarreling with the military men—but they are not exactly in agreement either. During his two-day visit, according to some sources, Secretary McNamara seemed disturbed that unanimity and harmony of view were lacking in the mixed civilian-military briefings he received.

The heads of the missions of the Central Intelligence Agency, the Information Agency, the embassy political section and the foreign-aid mission, and of the special pacification team directed by Edward G. Landsdale are scheduled to fly to Washington in about a week for intensive meetings with the inter-agency Vietnam Coordinating Committee to attempt to reach a more unified national position on Vietnam. The meeting had been scheduled before Mr. McNamara visited here, but it has now assumed more importance.

Northern Units Near Saigon

SAIGON, Dec. 4 (AP)—Four North Vietnamese regiments have moved to within 60 miles of Saigon, informed military sources report.

The highly mobile regiments, whose positions change overnight, are ranged in a fan from northwest of the capital, near the Cambodian border in Tay Ninh Province, through Binh

Long to the eastern edge of Longkhanh Province.

Although no all-out assault on Saigon is expected, the sudden strengthening of Communist forces in what has long been Vietcong-dominated territory will mean bitter fighting for United States and South Vietnamese units north of Saigon.

Call-up Called Inevitable

Special to The New York Times

WASHINGTON, Dec. 4—Military experts said today that some Reserve and National Guard personnel "inevitably" would be called to active duty if United States forces in South Vietnam were increased to 350,000 men.

No official comment was available on whether a request by United States military leaders in Vietnam for such a build-up was likely to be approved.

The Administration has gone to great lengths to avoid calling up Reserve or Guard forces but has never foreclosed the possibility. If any are called, individual specialists in communications, transportation and clerical work are expected to be among the first.

Another early source of manpower, if a call-up is ordered, would be a 145,000-man "select force" being established with personnel drawn mainly from the Army National Guard.

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